



DESERT ROCK ENERGY PROJECT WILL HELP NAVAJO NATION REGAIN ITS ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

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Once, the Navajo people were known as proud, fierce and independent. We traveled freely within our Four Sacred Mountains, making all we used, hunting and growing all we ate. Then, we were subjugated by a foreign power and almost wiped out. We survived, but dependency was forced upon us that we continue to struggle to shake off to this day.

For decades, Navajos have called upon their leaders to bring economic development and jobs to the Navajo Nation. Every Navajo Nation Council, and each Navajo president and chairman going back to Sam Ahkeah in 1946, has struggled to do just that. In every chapter meeting I attend, it is what Navajos continue to say. It is what the Navajo Nation needs for economic and cultural survival.

After World War II, as Americans got rural electrification and water systems, Navajos got sheep dips and windmills. As Americans got suburbs and highways, Navajos got BIA boarding school compounds and road graders. As American veterans got GI Bill loans to buy houses, Navajo veterans only got sent home because they lived on a "reservation."

Today, we see prosperity, growth and development all around the Navajo Nation, but not here. Every highway leading off the Navajo Nation leads to flourishing economies on our borders, such as Farmington. And every highway leading onto the Navajo Nation leads to economic silence.

But this is not what Navajos want. And neither do they want to continue to rely on the Federal government. The Navajo people want jobs. They want their own businesses. They want a measure of financial independence and success in their own homeland, and that begins by building a viable Navajo economy.

Federal laws going back to the 1830s and meant to protect Navajos from exploitation instead discouraged almost all economic activity. The transition from a trading post-and-pawn economy

was cut off by a tourniquet of regulation that became tighter and tighter as our Navajo population grew. Until now, the possibility of economic growth was not to be.

It is my Nation's belief that the Desert Rock Energy Project, and the additional business and employment it will inevitably create, will change that. Our leaders see it as a way to impact the entire Navajo economy in a positive, environmentally-responsible way.

Despite what its opponents say, the majority of our people support this project. Last year, the Navajo Nation Council voted 66-7 to issue the lease and sub-lease for the project to the Diné Power Authority. Just last week, the Eastern Navajo Agency Council, representing 31 Navajo chapters, voted 96-0 to support it. Along with jobs, it will bring \$50 million a year to the Navajo Nation government, almost a third of what it generates on its own today.

Desert Rock is not just another power plant. It will not exploit our people and lay waste our land and air, as opponents charge. It will be the cleanest coal-fired power plant built in the U.S. today, a model for all others that follow. It will use supercritical boiler technology to produce far fewer emissions than conventional coal plants that now make our electricity. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says the proposed emission levels are the lowest ever applied for anywhere in the country.

Beyond that, its developer, Sithe-Global, has agreed to do everything possible to ensure the most stringent emission standards are achieved while keeping the cost of its electricity competitive. The plant will use proven technology to reduce mercury and other emissions, and reduce carbon dioxide by 20 percent. It will be built to add carbon capture technology when it's available and economical. It will use a tenth of the water used by other plants. It will use the plentiful supply of Navajo coal. It will be built using all the Navajo labor available, and afterward will be operated by Navajo technicians.

Once construction begins, Desert Rock will be the largest economic development project in Native America. To the Navajo Nation, this \$2.5 billion project represents self-determination, jobs and income for our people and for the State of New Mexico. Navajos have waited many years for an opportunity like this and have often seen such opportunities go to others. If the Navajo Nation does not build Desert Rock, inevitably, someone else will, and achieve the benefits it will bring.

For decades, our young people have left Navajoland for educational and economic opportunity, not because they didn't want to live at home. Sadly, many have not returned. Without jobs and income here in the future, many more won't. With them goes the hope for the continuation of our language, our culture, and our way of life.

Desert Rock represents our Nation's chance to begin to rebuild our Navajo economy, help us bring our children home, perpetuate our culture and way of life, and return us to the pride and independence we once knew as a people.